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ABSTRACT

Data from 61 children's groups indicate that early adolescent (modal age 10 years) and late adolescent (modal age 15 years) children's groups are characterized by high levels of normative integration, or norm consensus. In contrast, groups passing through middle adolescence (modal age 11-14 years) are characterized by significantly lower levels of normative integration. The findings are discussed with reference to current formulations concerning adolescent role discontinuities, alienation, and contra-cultures. Group normative integration is not differentially associated with group size or social class but is significantly related to variations in age, sex, camp environment, and conformity to perceived peer group expectations (r= .87). (Author)

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"NORMATIVE INTEGRATION, ALIENATION, AND CONFORMITY IN ADOLESCENT GROUPS"

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"Normative Integration, Alienation, and Conformity in Adolescent Groups"

The social science literature typically reflects the view that adolescence is a period of intense change, conflict, and instability for youth (Count, 1967; Friedenberg, 1969; Philips and Szurek, 1970; Shore and Massimo, 1969). More than three decades ago, Benedict (1938) suggested that in most cultures the transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by a series of important role discontinuities. Whereas role expectations for the child's position presumably focus upon submission, asexuality, and non-responsibility those for the adult emphasize dominance, sexuality, and responsibility. The rapidity of transition from child to adult position is oftentimes viewed as one correlate of the extent of transition difficulty. In most instances a gradual transition is deemed desirable in order to ease the stresses attendant with discontinuous role expectations and behavioral demands (Biddle and Thomas, 1966, pp. 345-383). Anticipatory socialization, wherein the child is permitted to experiment partially and somewhat leisurely with the obligations and privileges of adulthood, presumably serves to alleviate such stresses. Likewise, formal rituals and symbols sometimes serve to denote key junctures during the passage to adulthood and to legitimize adult role behavior by newcomers to the position, thus further diminishing the posited transition stresses.

Although many investigators contend that the greater part of adolescent behavioral difficulties stem from inconsistencies,

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contradictions, and rapid transitions in values, attitudes and role expectations (cf. Carroll, 1969; Count, 1967; Philips and Szurek,1970) the supporting empirical literature is meager. Indeed, the very plausibility of the discontinuity hypothesis may have contributed to its wide acceptance with only a minimum of empirical evidence. Whatever the reason, there is a distinct paucity of systematic research concerning valuative, attitudinal, and normative transitions during adolescence (Child, 1954). Moreover, few of the available studies investigate the relationship between adolescent norms and middle-range social structural variables. Instead, most analyses tend to focus upon relatively global desiderata, such as the cultural determinants noted by Benedict (1938).

Were the discontinuity hypothesis valid, it would follow that adolescent value preferences, attitudinal orientations, and role expectations ought to be reflected in the behavioral norms of adolescent peer groups. More specifically, there should occur an analogous transition within such groups wherein there is (1) a high degree of norm consensus, or normative integration, during early adolescence, (2) significantly less norm consensus during the middle stages of adolescence and, subsequently (3) a high degree of norm consensus during late adolescence. The following discussion will present empirical data permitting systematic examination of the discontinuity hypothesis. Moreover, evidence will be presented regarding the differential effects of middle-range structural variables, such as the immediate group environment, upon the normative integration of adolescent groups.

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METHOD

Group Normative Integration

Following Thibaut and Kelley (1959, p. 129), a norm will be defined as a behavioral rule that is accepted by all or most members of the group. In the present discussion normative integration of the group will refer to the degree of consensus among group members concerning a number of group-relevant behaviors. In order to measure group normative integration an index (Feldman, 1968) was designed to ascertain which group members generally share a given set of norms. From a pre-test pool of 120 items, 20 questions were selected for inclusion in the normative integration index. The questions referred to topics such as relations with persons of the opposite sex, cigarette smoking, attendance at religious services, swearing, fighting, cheating, gambling, aggressive sports activity, group responsibility, neatness, and so forth. Identical questionnaires were administered to male and female subjects except for references to gender.

Respondents were instructed to select one of five scale positions for each normative item. The average score for each of the twenty items was then calculated for each separate group. The extent to which individual group members varied from the group average for each item was determined and the member's total deviation, summed for all twenty items, was figured. The total deviation for each member was then divided by twenty, the total number of items, in order to ascertain his average normative deviation. This figure was then subtracted from 4.00, since responses were coded from 0 to 4, so that higher scores would reflect higher normative integration into the group. The resultant score can be

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considered representative of an individual's "normative integration into the group." The "normative integration of the group" was then determined by calculating the average of the individual normative integration scores for each group. Groups with high scores were considered to have greater normative integration than groups with low scores.

Subjects

The subjects were 538 boys and girls, ranging in age from 9 to 16 years, who attended four camps for Jewish children located in the Midwestern United States. Two of the camps were conducted by community sponsored organizations, were co-educational, and served predominantly lower-middle class children (determined by reports of parents' income, education, and occupation). The other two camps were conducted under private auspices and primarily served upper-middle class and lower-upper class children. One private camp was co-educational and the other served boys only.

The 538 subjects constituted 61 cabin groups. The cabin group was the basic unit of analysis for the present study. At all four camps members of a cabin group roomed together, took their meals together, and frequently participated in recreation and work activities as a unit. There were 34 boys' groups, consisting of 288 subjects, and 27 girls' groups, consisting of 250 subjects. Group size varied from 6 to 13 members. The average number of members per cabin was 8.8 and the mode was 10.

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RESULTS

Sex and Group Normative Integration

A substantial literature suggests that the members of girls' groups are more concerned with harmonious relations, social approval, and conformity to peer expectations than are the members of boys' groups (Allen and Crutchfield, 1963; Carrigan and Julian, 1966; Crown and Liverman, 1963; Hollander, et al. 1965; Patel and Gordon, 1960; Tuddenham, 1958). Consequently one might anticipate that the former groups would exhibit higher levels of normative integration than the latter. Utilizing multiple classification analysis (Feldman, 1968; Freedman and Coombs, 1966) to mathematically adjust for age, group size, and camp, it was found that female groups had substantially higher normative integration scores (mean = 3.29) than male groups (mean = 3.18). In fact, as noted in Table I, 50 per cent of the male groups exhibited a low level of normative integration whereas more than 95 per cent of the female groups exhibited either medium or high levels ($p < .001$, chi square test, two-tailed). This finding might initially suggest that the relatively high normative integration of girls' groups would serve to make their transition through adolescence less discontinuous and problematic than for their male counterparts. It also may cast an additional perspective upon the interpretation of differential delinquency rates among youth, particularly regarding the significantly higher rates generally noted for males. However, such interpretations must be held in abeyance pending examination of the differential relationship between age and the normative integration of adolescent groups.

Table I about here

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Age and Group Normative Integration

Review of Table II supports the hypothesis that the normative integration of adolescent groups bears an inverse curvilinear relationship to the modal age of group members. Adjusting for sex, camp, and group size, groups with a modal member age of 10 years clearly exhibit a high level of normative integration (mean = 3.27). By comparison, the normative integration of 11-14 year old groups is significantly lower (mean = 3.22). In further contrast, groups with a modal age of 15 years exhibit the highest level of normative integration (mean = 3.29). Mean differences for the three age categories are significant beyond the .001 level (analysis of variance test).

Table II about here

Several additional observations are particularly noteworthy with reference to the above findings. First, when scores for the 11 - 14 year old categories are further analyzed as separate mean scores for 11, 12, 13, and 14 year old groups, all means are found to be substantially lower than those for either the 10 or 15 year old groups. Hence the lower scores for the 11-14 year old groups cannot be considered an artefact of mathematical averaging. Second, the age-mediated differences in group normative integration (Table II) become especially visible following mathematical adjustments for the sex variable through the use of multiple classification analysis. Lacking such adjustments the relationship between members' modal age and group normative integration would be much less apparent.

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Hence group normative integration is strongly influenced by the interaction between sex and age. It is apparent that many earlier studies regarding the relationship between age and group norms have been unduly limited because requisite adjustments were lacking for the variable of sex. The foregoing data, then, strongly support the supposition that the middle years of adolescence are characterized by significantly lower levels of adolescent normative integration than either the early or late years.

Camp and Group Normative Integration

Examination of Table III indicates that three variables (sex, age, and camp) explain a substantial proportion (35%) of the variance in group normative integration scores. Of these, sex explains the largest proportion of variance (16%). Although age explains an additional 7% of the variance the camp environment is found to explain an even larger additional proportion (12%). It is noteworthy that the groups in one private camp exhibited the highest mean normative integration whereas those in the other private camp exhibited the lowest. Hence contrary to expectation social class cannot be considered a particularly crucial determinant of differential normative integration in adolescent groups. Although norms may vary substantively by social class, relative levels of normative

Table III about here

integration may not be particularly variant. Similarly, group size was not systematically associated with differential degrees of group normative integration. Although smaller groups (6,7,8 or 9 members) tended to have slightly higher mean levels of normative

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integration than larger groups (10, 11, 12, or 13 members) the differences were not significantly different for the range of sizes studied. The effects of varying religious background could not be examined since this factor was held constant in the present study.

Groups in the all male camp exhibited substantially higher levels of normative integration than those in the three co-educational camps. Consequently sex composition of the extra-group environment, along with attendant differences in cross-sex interaction frequency, may be viewed as a rather basic, but integral, determinant of the diversity of behavioral norms within peer groups. At a broader level this observation is analogous to the findings of Brim's (1958) classic study wherein cross-sex siblings were found to possess significantly more traits appropriate to the opposite sex than same-sex siblings. Although a large variety of sub-factors necessarily are represented under the rubric of "camp" it seems apparent that examination of this variable suggests the efficacy of viewing modalities of intra-group integration, such as normative integration, partially within the context of extra-group variables that proceed beyond the group level of analysis but, at the same time, are not so broad as "culture" and similarly abstract referents.

Conformity and Group Normative Integration

Group normative integration may be regarded as a useful construct insofar as it demonstrates predictive potency with reference to varying types of inter personal behavior in adolescent groups or

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other social units. The present study will examine the relationship between group normative integration and a dependent variable that has constituted a central focus for numerous studies of adolescence, viz., conformity behavior.

A substantial literature suggests that situations characterized by highly ambiguous physical or social stimuli are more conducive to behavioral conformity than those where the stimuli are clear and unambiguous (Allen, 1965; Asch, 1962; Backman, 1963; Berg and Bass, 1961; Dibner, 1958; Frank, 1961; Iscoe and Williams, 1963; Karlins and Abelson, 1970). In such situations members are highly susceptible to conformity towards the definitions of "social reality" set forth by their peers (Cartwright and Zander, 1968; Kelman, 1950). However, it would seem plausible that susceptibility to conformity pressures from peers ought to be differentially influenced by pre-existing group conditions, including the extent of normative integration within the group. Members who share norms should be accustomed to conforming towards the expectations of their peers. Conversely, interpersonal conformity behavior should be low in groups where members' consensus concerning norms is low.

Although many studies have investigated the relationship between conformity pressures and conforming behavior few have examined the relationship between conformity and developmental group attributes such as normative integration. In large part this state of affairs may be attributable to the heavy emphasis placed upon laboratory studies of conformity behavior. Although this methodological approach affords the advantage of rigorous control over extraneous variables it also mitigates against systematic examination of the

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relationship between conformity behavior and emergent group properties that do not lend themselves readily to spontaneous or contrived development within the laboratory. In the present study, however, group members had engaged in continuous social interaction over a period of two or more weeks. Hence group normative integration clearly can be viewed as an independent variable evolving prior to the experimental situation.

In order to test the null hypothesis of no relationship between group normative integration and conformity behavior the members of each group were exposed to a brief conformity experiment. A trained experimenter met separately with the members of each cabin group and announced that all the cabins in their unit were to compete for a prize. The subjects were shown a drawing of an American Indian symbol, were presented with a list of 11 possible answers, and were asked to select the single figure they thought to be represented by the symbol. In order to control for the effects of expertise the true answers were omitted from the list of 11 choices. Each subject was given an answer sheet and asked to circle his choice. Following selection of their answers the experimenter informed the subjects that he would tabulate their responses, report the two "leading choices", and offer everyone a second opportunity to choose an answer. Furthermore, subjects were informed that they would be expected to announce their second answers to the cabin group after the experiment and that the prize would be awarded to the group with the highest proportion of correct answers. Following the subjects' initial answers tabulations were reported by the experimenters in such a manner as to lead each member to believe that

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everyone in the group except himself had selected one of the two "leading choices". In actuality, however, none of the group members had selected the two answers reported as "leading choices". Conformity behavior was then measured by determining whether or not the subject shifted his second selection to one of the previously announced "leading choices."

In order to assure a more conservative measure of conformity the experiment was immediately repeated utilizing a different symbol[1] and a different list of 11 possible answers. Only those group members who conformed on both tests were classified as "conformers". Following termination of the experiment the subjects were informed that it was unnecessary to divulge their answers. All the cabin groups were then brought together, the purpose of the experiment was explained and, if permitted by camp policy, each participant was awarded a prize. Immediately following the experiment observers rated the experiment for reliability according to a five point scale. Data were analyzed only for groups with an experimental reliability of "sure" or "very sure". Utilizing the above design it was possible to classify certain group members as "conformers" or "non-conformers" within each group.

Table IV about here

Results

Review of Table IV indicates that the null hypothesis must be rejected. A strong positive relationship exists between group normative integration and the proportion of conformers in each group. The corresponding product-moment correlation between the two variables is .97.

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Discussion and Summary

The foregoing data introduce several new considerations to the examination of adolescent behavior. While bearing in mind the limits of acceptable generalization (particuarly regarding religious homogeneity of the sample and the extent of permissible extrapolation from an experimental situation) a number of tentative conclusions may be set forth. In large part the data provide evidence affirming the credibility of the discontinuity hypothesis. Whereas early adolescent (modal age 10 years) and late adolescent (modal age 15 years) childreds groups are characterized by high levels of normative integration those groups passing through middle adolescence (modal age 11 to 14 years) are characterized by significantly lower levels of normative integration. This finding is particularly germane since it casts new light upon a major contention of many theorists, to wit, that adolescence represents a period during which youth primarily are in rebellion against values and norms of the adult world. This contention oftentimes has been accompanied by an implication that the posited rebellion results in the adoption of a set of clear-cut counter-values or counter-norms (Friedenberg, 1969; Philips and Szurek, 1970). However, the foregoing data suggest that adolescent groups are not characterized by adherence to a particular set of norms or values, regardless of whether they support or contest those of adults. Instead, adolescence seems to involve a transition wherein peer groups pass (1) from a period of relatively high norm consensus (2) through a period of significantly lower norm consensus, and (3) again to a period of relatively high norm consensus. Further

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examination of the discontinuity and contra-culture hypotheses must be predicated upon substantive studies of group norms and upon comparative data from adult groups.

Considering Seeman's (1959) five aspects of alienation (powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, self-estrangement, and normlessness) it seems apparent that the latter may be especially important for the interpretation of adolescent behavior.[2] Rather than serving as a source of support for any particular normative structures, including those of the adult world, the adolescent peer group appears to be a relatively normless social unit devoid of support for any clear-cut set of behavioral norms. Except for the early and late stages of adolescence the peer group is more likely a source of role ambiguity than an anchorage for stable role definitions.

The data also suggest that the transition to adolescence is somewhat less problematic for girls than for boys. Peer group normative integration remains significantly higher throughout adolescence for the former subjects. The variables of sex and age tend to interact strongly and thus obscure the effect of one another. However, mathematical adjustments through multiple classification analysis clearly reveal the differential effects of these variables and serve to highlight the fact that each independently explains a substantial proportion of the variance in group normative integration scores (13% and 7% respectively). Variations in group normative integration were not significantly correlated with group size although there was a slight tendency for smaller groups (6, 7, 8, or 9 members) to exhibit higher normative integration than larger groups (10, 11, 12, or 13 members). Since the members of all groups had lived together continuously for at least two weeks it seems possible

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that groups within the entire size range studied were equally conducive to the emergence of varying degrees of normative integration. Although normative integration levels did not vary significantly according to social class it is possible that the substantive norms shared by group members may vary according to that factor. The data also indicate that the peer group's immediate social environment bears a significant relationship to group normative integration. The camp environment, particularly sex composition of the camp, was differentially associated with normative integration. Since broader aspects of the social environment exert discernible effects upon structural features of the small group future studies of adolescent peer groups ought not be conducted or assessed in vacuo. The relationship between group structural variables and broader structural variables can be examined most satisfactorily when operational efforts regarding the latter refrain from the utilization of ultra-global constructs such as "culture".

Finally, the results of a conformity experiment revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = .87$) between group normative integration and the proportion of group members conforming to perceived peer group expectations. Hence, pending the elaboration of proper longitudinal studies one may infer that the relatively great non-conformity attributed to adolescents may be a partial artefact of low norm consensus within adolescent peer groups. The complexity of the relationship between group normative integration and adolescent conformity behavior is set in proper perspective, however, when it is recalled that the former variable may be differentially influenced by a host of social factors, including sex, age, and selected attributes of the extra-group social environment.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Both symbols previously had been used for different purposes in an experiment by Bachrach, et al. (1961).

2. It is noteworthy that Seeman's conceptual definition of "meaninglessness" is more akin to the typical connotation of "normlessness" than is his own definition of the latter. Most writers suggest that normlessness is characterized by one or more of the following conditions: purposelessness, conflict of norms, unclarity of norms, or absence of norms (cf. Dean, 1961; Simmons, 1966). Seeman, however, asserts that normlessness prevails when there is a "high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviors are required to achieve given goals" (1958, p. 788) and "meaninglessness" is extant when "the individual is unclear as to what he ought to believe--when the individual's minimal standards for clarity in decision-making are not met"(1958, p. 786).

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TABLE I: Group Normative Integration, By Sex (N = 61).

Extent of Group Normative Integration*	Sex	
	Male	Female
Low	50.0%	14.8%
Medium	26.5%	40.7%
High	23.5%	44.4%
Total	100.0%	99.9%
N	34	27

* Low, medium and high categories were obtained by trichotimization of the total sample of group normative integration scores ($p < .001$, chi square test, two-tailed).

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TABLE II: Group Normative Integration Scores, By Modal Age of Group Members (N = 61).*

Age (modal, in years)	N	Group Normative Integration Scores
10	10	3.27
11 - 14	48	3.22
15	3	3.29
	61	

* $p < .05$, analysis of variance test.

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TABLE III: Additional Proportion of Variance in Group Normative Integration Scores Explained by Sex, Age, and Camp (N = 61).

Variable	Additional Proportion of Variance Explained
Sex	.16
Age	.07
Camp	.12
	.35 Total

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TABLE IV: Level of Group Normative Integration, By Proportion of Conformers in Group (N = 61).

Group Normative Integration*	N	Proportion of Conformers
Low	20	37.6%
Medium	20	39.4%
High	21	44.6%
	61	

*Low, medium, and high categories obtained by trichotimization of total sample of group normative integration scores ($p < .001$, analysis of variance test; $r = .87$).

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